

Characters

- ISIDORE, AN ANDROGYNOUS CLOWN
- LEOPOLD, AN EARNEST YOUTH

SCENE:

A room, the same throughout the play. The floor is carpeted. The door is bolted with an oversize padlock. There is a big filing cabinet, an armchair, a secretary, a wall mirror, a water jug, a radio, three porcelain teapots, a large vase, a blackboard. There is a large canvas sack on the floor. A recess in the back wall serves as a shrine. Within the recess, hanging from nails, are a guitar, a whip, a toy parrot, a Persian helmet, two swords, a cape, a compass, a muleta, a pair of bulls horns, six banderillas, two masks in the form of beetles' faces. The shrine is decorated with a string of flower-shaped lightbulbs. Isidore sits in the shrine. His appearance is a mixture of man and woman. He is stout, has long hair, and is wearing rouge and lipstick; he wears a man's hat and pants, high-heeled shoes, and a silk blouse. There is a corsage of flowers pinned on his shirt. Sometimes his behavior is clearly masculine; other times he could be thought a woman. Leopold is inside the canvas sack. He is in his twenties. He is handsome, and his movements are simple. He wears a business suit. Each time Isidore feels he has said something important, he takes a card from his pocket or from a drawer and flips it across the room in any direction. (*The word "card" in the script indicates when a card should be flipped.*) This action is automatic.

Scene 1

SCENE 1

(Isidore makes a gesture and his shrine is lit. He makes another gesture and chimes sound. One more gesture and the bulbs on his shrine light up. Leopold begins to move inside the canvas sack. Isidore notices the sack and cautiously approaches it.)

ISIDORE

Look what the stork has brought me.

(Isidore opens the sack. Leopold begins to emerge. They stare at each other for a while. Isidore is delighted with what he has found. He goes to the shrine, takes the guitar and begins to sing "A Sleepy Lagoon" in an attempt to charm Leopold.)

Song and guitar accompaniment by Isidore.

(Card.)

(Leopold has gotten out of the sack and walks curiously about the room. He stops in front of the armchair. Isidore, noticing Leopold's interest in the furniture, addresses him in the affected tones of a salesman in an exclusive shop.)

Queen Anne walnut armchair. Representing the acme of artistic craftsmanship of the Philadelphia school. Circa 1740. Original condition and finish.

(Card.)

(Isidore steps down from the shrine, walks ostentatiously past Leopold, and runs his hand along the surface of the secretary.)

Very rare, small, Louis-Quinze secretary, representing the acme of artistic craftsmanship of the Parisian school. A pure Louis-Quinze leg was never, under any conditions, straight. It was always curvilinear, generally in that shaping which we have come to know as the "cabriole."

(Card. Taking little steps to the mirror.)

Louis-Quatorze carved and gilded mirror.

(Card.)

Bearing sprays of leafage and flowers. Circa 1700. Height sixty-four inches. Width thirty-six inches.

(Isidore walks close to Leopold and looks him over.)

The choice of the examples here is influenced by their significance as distinct types representative of the best tradition, not only in the style and execution but in the choice of subject.

(Card. Isidore walks toward the shelf containing the porcelain objects.)

Teapots of rarest Chinese export porcelain with American marine decoration. Circa 1840-1850. Left one shows American Flag, right one American admiral's insignia. The one in the center depicts the so-called "Governor Duff," actually Diedrick Durven, Governor-general of the Dutch East India Company. Exquisite, isn't it? This collection has been formed throughout a period of many years, and it is probably not an exaggeration to say that such a collection could not be formed again.

(Waiting for a reaction.)

Did you say something? ... Oh, well ... Listen ... Music ... A tango ...

(Card. Isidore begins to dance.)

Do you know this step? Stomach in. Derriere out. Fingers gracefully curved.

(Card.)

A smile on your lips. Eyes full of stars. Dancing has well been called the poetry of motion. It is the art whereby the feelings of the mind are expressed by measured steps, regulated motions of the body, and graceful gestures. The German waltz, the Spanish fandango, the Polish mazurka, and last but not least the Argentine tango. One ... two ... three ... dip and turn your head to show your profile. One ... two ... three ... dip and swing your little foot back and forth.

(Leopold begins to imitate Isidore.)

One ... two ... three ... and rotate on one foot, taking little steps with the other. Watch me first. Now you made me lose my step. And a one and a two and a three. Stomach in. Derriere out. Fingers gracefully curved. A smile on your lips. Eyes full of stars. One ... two ... three ... dip and profile. One ... two ... three ... and rotate.

(Leopold's attention is drawn by the shrine; he moves closer to it.)

Don't look there yet. Watch me ... watch me.

(Leopold watches for a moment, then he turns to the shrine again and reaches for the whip. Isidore takes the whip and demonstrates its use.)

This is my whip.

(Lashing Leopold.)

And that is pain.

(Card.)

A souvenir of love. I loved her. She loved me. I gave her the whip. She gave me her cherry ... All is fair in love and war.

(Card. Taking the parrot.)

This is my talking parrot.

(To the parrot.)

Pretty parrot.

(Speaking in a parrot voice.)

Pretty parrot.

(In his own voice.)

Very smart. He knows everything.

(In a parrot voice.)

Very smart. He knows everything.

(In his own voice.)

Thank you.

(In a parrot voice.)

Thank you.

(Putting on the Persian helmet.)

And this is the genuine Persian helmet I wore when I fought at Salamis.

(Card.)

I killed two hundred and fifteen Athenians. Fourteen were captains, three were generals, and the rest foot soldiers. I'll show you.

(Isidore takes the sword and swings it while he screams, grunts, whirls, and hops. Leopold becomes frightened.)

That's how I killed them. Don't be afraid, I won't hurt you.

(Touching Leopold's chest with the tip of the sword.)

Do you have something to show me?

LEOPOLD

No. I don't have anything.

ISIDORE

Nothing at all?

LEOPOLD

No.

ISIDORE

Oh, that's too bad. Here, I'll show you my flying cape.

(Isidore puts on the cape, climbs on a chair, flips his arms, and jumps to the floor.)

Extraordinary, isn't it? Would you like to see my joy compass?

(Showing him the joy compass.)

It's magic. I sent for it ... it points to joy. Now you show me something.

LEOPOLD

I don't own anything.

ISIDORE

Were your things taken away?

LEOPOLD

No, I never had anything, except ...

ISIDORE

What?

LEOPOLD

A tattoo.

(He opens his shirt.)

ISIDORE

Oh, how beautiful.

(Reading.)

"This is man. Heaven or bust." Oh, that's in bad taste. That's in terrible taste.

(Card.)

Just for that you can't touch any of my things. The only things you can touch are those cards. Those cards are yours.

(Card.)

LEOPOLD

(Picking up a card.)

These cards are mine?

(Reading.)

"A tattoo." Oh. How beautiful. This is man. Heaven or bust. Oh, that's in bad taste."

ISIDORE

You can put them there in that filing cabinet.

LEOPOLD

(Disturbed.)

Why do you write what I say?

ISIDORE

First of all, I write what *we* say. And then I don't write. I print ... with my magic printing press ... if you'd like to know. File them in your filing cabinet. That cabinet is yours too.

LEOPOLD

What for?

ISIDORE

So you can find them when you need them. These cards contain wisdom. File them away.

(Card.)

Know where they are.

(Card.)

Have them at hand.

(Card.)

Be one upon whom nothing is lost.

(Card.)

Memorize them and you'll be where you were.

(Card.)

Be where you are. Then and now. Pick them up.

LEOPOLD

(Reading a card.)

"All is fair in love and war."

ISIDORE

That's a good one.

LEOPOLD

Why?

ISIDORE

Because it teaches you that all is fair in love and war, and it teaches you that when someone is telling you a story about love and war, you are not to stand there and say ... That's not fair ... or you'll be considered a perfect fool.

(Card.)

LEOPOLD

(Still disturbed.)

I don't see why love in war should be different from love in anything else.

ISIDORE

(Pulling Leopold's ear and shouting.)

Not love in war. Love and war! It has taken centuries ...

(Smack.)

Centuries, to arrive at this ethical insight *and you say it isn't fair.*

(Smack.)

All is fair. You hear? All is fair in love ...

(smack)

and war.

(Smack.)

LEOPOLD

I don't want your cards. I don't want to have anything to do with them.

ISIDORE

These are not my cards. They are yours. It's you who need learning, not me. I've learned already.

(Card.)

I know all my cards by heart.

(Card.)

I can recite them in chronological order and I don't leave one word out.

(Card.)

What's more I never say a thing which is not an exact quotation from one of my cards.

(Card.)

That's why I never hesitate.

(Card.)

Why I'm never short of an answer.

(Card.)

Or a question.

(Card.)

Or a remark, if a remark is more appropriate.

LEOPOLD

I don't want to learn that way.

ISIDORE

There is no other way.

LEOPOLD

Yes, there is. I hear a voice.

ISIDORE

What voice? That's me you hear. I am the only voice.

LEOPOLD

No, it's not you.

ISIDORE

It is so.

(In a falsetto voice.)

Listen to me and always obey me ... It's me ... me ... It's me ... and only me ... Leopold ... Lippy ... *me ... me ...*

LEOPOLD

No.

ISIDORE

Well, *Dime con quien andas y te dire quien eres ...*

(Card.)

Spanish proverb meaning ... You know what it means, and if you don't, go and ask that voice of yours.

(Pause.)

What does your voice say?

LEOPOLD

You speak like a parrot.

ISIDORE

No, I don't. My diction is better. Sally says she sells sea shells at the seashore? Have you ever heard a parrot say: Sally says she sells sea shells at the seashore?

LEOPOLD

That's not what I mean.

ISIDORE

(Considers for a moment.)

I talk like a wise parrot. Study hard, learn your cards, and one day, you too will be able to talk like a parrot.

LEOPOLD

(Imitating a parrot.)

Study hard, learn your cards and one day, you too will be able to talk like a parrot.

ISIDORE

What are you, a parrot? Do you want to be a moron for the rest of your life? Always being pushed around?

(Isidore pushes Leopold.)

Are you mentally retarded? Do I have to tell you what should be obvious to a halfwit?

(Smack.)

It should be obvious

(smack)

even

(smack)

to a half-wit.

(Leopold throws a punch at Isidore. Isidore ducks, and kicks Leopold. Leopold falls. Isidore turns and thrusts his buttocks out.)

You bad, bad boy. You'll have to be punished. You tried to hit your loving teacher. Come.

(Isidore picks Leopold up.)

LEOPOLD

(Freeing himself from Isidore.)

Take your hands off me.

(Leopold executes each of Isidore's commands at the same time as it is spoken, but as if he were acting spontaneously rather than obeying.)

ISIDORE

Walk to the door.

(Card.)

Notice the padlock.

(Card.)

Push the door.

(Card.)

You're locked in.

(Card.)

Stand there and think.

(Card.)

Why are you locked in?

(Card.)

Where are you locked in?

(Card.)

Turn to the door.

(Card.)

You know what to do.

(Card.)

Pull the padlock.

(Card.)

Push the door.

(Card.)

Force the padlock.

(Card.)

You are locked in.

(Card.)

Kick the door.

(Card.)

Bang the door.

(Card.)

Scream.

ISIDORE & LEOPOLD

Anybody there! Anybody there!

(Card.)

Let me out.

(Card.)

Open up!

(Card.)

ISIDORE

Kick the door.

(Card.)

Walk around the room restlessly.

(Card.)

Bite your thumbnail.

(Card.)

Get an idea.

(Card.)

You got an idea.

(Card. Leopold charges toward Isidore.)

Violence does not pay.

(Card.)

Be sensible, stand still a moment being sensible. Have sensible thoughts. For every door there's a key.

(Card.)

The key must be in the room. Look for it in the obvious place first. Under the rare seventeenth-century needlework carpet depicting Elijah in the desert fed by ravens. It's not there. Look in Louis-Quinze secretary, mahogany wood. Look in less obvious places. Magnificent marked Wedg-wood vase in Rosso Antico ground. In flyleaf of my Gutenberg Bible. Look in places which are not obvious at all. Correction. All places are obvious places.

(Card.)

Look again in drawer of very rare, small, Louis-Quinze secretary, representing the acme of artistic craftsmanship. Fall exhausted on Queen Anne chair. Have desperate thoughts.

(Leopold kicks the chair. Isidore speaks soothingly, to regain control.)

Collect yourself, darling. You must collect yourself.

LEOPOLD

I must collect myself.

ISIDORE

You must collect yourself. You must think, dear. Let's think. Could you have enemies? Perhaps business associates? Perhaps people who envy you? Or could it be the others? The angry husbands? The spinsters? The barking dogs? The man whose toilet you dirtied?

LEOPOLD

Could it be you?

ISIDORE

Could it be you? it doesn't really matter. You might as well stay. Just tidy up your things, darling. Do as I said. File them away.

LEOPOLD

(Picks up a card and reads it.)

And that is pain.

ISIDORE

Be where you were.

(Card.)

LEOPOLD

(Reading another card.)

Pretty parrot. Very smart. He knows everything.

ISIDORE

Then and now.

(Card.)

LEOPOLD

(Reading another card.)

Were your things taken away?

ISIDORE

Nothing is lost.

(Card.)

LEOPOLD

Nothing is lost?

ISIDORE

Nothing. Come, it's time for your drawing lesson.

(Isidore rings the bell and walks to the blackboard to illustrate the lesson.)

How to draw a portrait.

(Making a mark at the top of the blackboard.)

This is the divine. Cleopatra, for example.

(Making a mark at the bottom of the blackboard.)

This down here is the despicable. The werewolf. Now we're going to place the person whose portrait we're drawing. Where shall we put him? Close to the divine? Not so close. Halfway down? Close to the despicable? No. Here.

(Isidore makes a mark to the left and halfway between the other two marks.)

Now you join the points with lines. This is the portrait of a mediocre person.

(Doing it.)

You can draw a mouth on it. And an eye. But it isn't necessary. Because what counts is the nose.

LEOPOLD

Draw my portrait.

ISIDORE

Unfortunately this system doesn't do you any good, since all we can establish is that I am at the top. And way down at the bottom is you. There is no other point. We therefore can't have an angle. We have only a vertical line. The space around us is infinite, enclosed as it may be, because there is not a third person. And if the space around us is infinite, so is, necessarily, the space between us.

LEOPOLD

Who says you're at the top?

ISIDORE

I.

LEOPOLD

I say you're not at the top.

ISIDORE

But I am.

LEOPOLD

How do you know?

ISIDORE

Because I know everything. I know my cards. I know everything.

LEOPOLD

I'm going to burn those cards.

ISIDORE

You'll die if you burn them ... don't take my word for it. Try it.

(Leopold sets fire to a card.)

What in the world are you doing? Are you crazy?

(Isidore puts the fire out.)

Are you out of your mind? You're going to die. Are you dying? Do you feel awful?

(Isidore trips Leopold.)

There! You died.

LEOPOLD

(Springing to his feet.)

No, I tripped. I think I tripped.

ISIDORE

See? You tripped because you burned that card. If I hadn't put the fire out you would have died.

LEOPOLD

I don't believe you.

ISIDORE

You don't believe me? You could have broken your neck. All right, I don't care what you think. You just stop burning things.

LEOPOLD

You're lying to me, aren't you?

ISIDORE

Go on, burn them if you want to. I won't stop you.

(Leopold moves to burn a card but then stops himself. Isidore flips a card at Leopold.)

Wisdom.

(Card. Isidore begins to dance.)

LEOPOLD

(Holding Isidore to stop him from dancing.)

I beg you.

ISIDORE

Don't put your hands on me, ever, ever, ever, ari, ari, ari. That's Bengali, you know.

(Card.)

It's you who need learning.

(Card.)

Very smart. He knows everything.

(Card.)

A souvenir of love. She gave me her cherry.

(Card.)

I killed two hundred and fifteen Athenians.

(Card.)

That's a good one.

(Card.)

A sleepy lagoon.

(Card.)

What does your voice say?

(Card.)

LEOPOLD

Stop flipping those things at me ... I beg you ... Don't ... Please ... I beg you.

(Kneels at Isidore's feet.)

ISIDORE

And a one and a two. One, two, three, dip and turn ... You still have to be punished. Don't think I forgot.

(Isidore takes Leopold by the hand and walks him to a corner. Leopold leans against the wall.)

Straighten yourself up. Are you hearing things again? I'm jealous. I want to hear too.

(Putting his ear against Leopold's ear.)

Where is it? I can't hear a thing.

(Talking into Leopold's ear.)

Yoo hoo. Where are you? Say something. Talk to me. It won't talk to me.

(To Leopold.)

Tell me what it says. I'm angry.

(Isidore sits on the shrine, crosses his legs and his arms, and turns his head away from Leopold.)

I'm angry. Don't talk to me. I said don't talk to me. Don't you see I'm in the typical position of anger? ... Do you want to say something to me?

LEOPOLD

No.

ISIDORE

Well, I want you to tell me what that awful voice was telling you.

LEOPOLD

It said, "Isidore deceives you." It said, "Don't listen to Isidore."

ISIDORE

Oh. Horrible. Horrible. Treason in my own house.

LEOPOLD

Let me tell you ...

ISIDORE

Oh. *Don't say any more, treason.* Oh.

LEOPOLD

Let me tell you what I think, Isidore.

ISIDORE

No.

LEOPOLD

Please.

ISIDORE

You've said enough.

LEOPOLD

I haven't said ...

ISIDORE

Treason!

LEOPOLD

Isidore!

ISIDORE

(In a whisper.)

Don't talk so loud.

LEOPOLD

(In a whisper.)

I haven't said ...

ISIDORE

I heard you already. Treason!

LEOPOLD

I want to leave.

ISIDORE

Bye, bye, butterfly.

LEOPOLD

I want to get out.

ISIDORE

See you later, alligator.

LEOPOLD

Give me the key.

ISIDORE

Pretty parrot.

LEOPOLD

I want the key.

ISIDORE

He wants the key.

PARROT

He wants the key.

ISIDORE

There is no key.

PARROT

No key.

LEOPOLD

You're lying.

ISIDORE

I always tell the truth. I worship truth and truth worships me. Don't be so stubborn. There is no key.

LEOPOLD

There must be a key.

ISIDORE

I see what possesses you. It's faith!

LEOPOLD

So what?

ISIDORE

Faith is a disgusting thing. It's treacherous and destructive. Mountains are moved from place to place. You can't find them. I won't have any of that.

LEOPOLD

Well, I do have faith.

ISIDORE

Infidel. I'm too upset. I can't take any more of this.

(Covers his face.)

It's the devil. I can't look at you. Tell me you'll give it up. Tell me you have no faith.

LEOPOLD

But I do.

ISIDORE

Well, I'm a mountain. Move me.

LEOPOLD

I know there is a way out because there have been moments I have been away from here.

ISIDORE

That's not true. You get ten demerits for telling lies.

LEOPOLD

It is true. There are moments when you have just vanished ...

ISIDORE

Vanished? I have never vanished.

LEOPOLD

I don't mean vanished ... exactly ... I mean there are moments when I've felt this is not all there is.

ISIDORE

What else is there?

LEOPOLD

Close your eyes ... Imagine ... that all is calm.

ISIDORE

I don't like playing childish games. I'm supposed to sit there imagining a field of orange blossoms and then you're going to pour a bucket of water on my head. Let me tell you, young man, that I played that game when I was five. Let me tell you that it was I who invented that game. And let me tell you that I didn't invent it to sit there like a fool and get the water on *my* head. I invented it to pour the water on the fool's head. Let me tell you that. You're not smart enough ... not for old Izzy.

(Card.)

LEOPOLD

I wasn't going to throw water on you.

ISIDORE

You weren't? Hm ... all right. Go on.

LEOPOLD

Don't imagine anything in particular. Don't imagine orange groves or anything. Make your mind a blank. Just imagine that you are in perfect harmony with everything around you ...

ISIDORE

Wait, I have to erase the orange grove.

LEOPOLD

Forget about the orange grove.

ISIDORE

I can't forget the orange grove. It's planted in my mind. I have to uproot it. You put things in my mind and then it's I who have to get rid of them. At least leave me in peace for a moment, while I do the work.

LEOPOLD

I didn't put anything in your mind.

ISIDORE

You said, "Don't think of an orange grove." You did, didn't you?

LEOPOLD

Yes ...

ISIDORE

Well, the moment you said that, an orange grove popped into my head. Now give me time while I get rid of it.

(Isidore moves about the room as if he were picking up oranges and throwing them over a fence with his eyes closed. Leopold's impatience increases.)

First I'll throw this orange over the fence. Then, this little orange. Then, this orange orange. Now this rotten orange. Now I pull this whole branch off the tree. Oh, oh, it's so hard. Now I pull this orange off the tree. Oh, oh, there are so many. There are thousands and thousands and I think millions and trillions. Oh, I'm tired. No, no, I must not rest. I can't take a moment's rest until I clear away all this mess of oranges. Thousands and thousands of acres, and then I have to clear the other side of the fence, and then the other, and then the other and then dismantle the fence, and then the other fence, and then ...

(Leopold reaches for the pitcher of water and empties it on Isidore. They remain motionless for a moment. Isidore goes to his shrine and sits in his typical angry position. Leopold walks to the opposite end of the room and sits down.)

I'll never trust you again.

(The lights fade. Isidore laughs out loud as the curtain falls.)

Scene 2

SCENE 2

(The curtain rises with Isidore and Leopold in the same position as at the end of the first scene.)

ISIDORE

(Sings.)

Isidore, I beg you
Have you no heart?
You play games,
And I'm so earnest.
Isidore, I beg you.
Can't you see
You're breaking my heart?
Cause while I'm so earnest,
You're still playing games.

Sung and composed by Isidore. Sixteen years old.

(Card.)

(Leopold looks at Isidore.)

Stop looking at me like that.

LEOPOLD

Like what?

ISIDORE

(Accompanying himself on the guitar.)

Like a lover. Transfigured by the presence of the beloved. Looking as though you want to breathe the minute bubbles of air imprisoned in each of my pores.

(Card.)

Or like a drug addict who imagines specks of heroin concealed in those beloved dimples.

(Card.)

LEOPOLD

And you think that's how I'm looking at you, you slob?

ISIDORE

I'm offended.

(Pause.)

Come and make up with old Isidore.

LEOPOLD

Leave me alone.

ISIDORE

You'd die of boredom if I left you alone ...

(Pause.)

You'd have to come to me sooner or later. Come now.

(Pause.)

What if I don't take you later?

LEOPOLD

The better for me.

ISIDORE

I'll count up to ten.

LEOPOLD

Count up to ten.

ISIDORE

Don't be a stubborn brat.

LEOPOLD

Leave me alone.

ISIDORE

(Takes the Persian helmet and sets it on Leopold's head.)

I'll let you wear it for a while. There's my baby. Isn't he cute.

(Leopold takes the helmet off.)

See how contradictory you are? When I wouldn't lend it to you, you wanted it. Now that I'm willing to lend it to you, you don't want it.

LEOPOLD

Oh, go to hell. You twist everything.

ISIDORE

Now you're being rude.

LEOPOLD

Go back to your hole.

(Leopold picks up some cards and begins to sort them.)

ISIDORE

My hole. My hole?

(Isidore looks through his cards.)

He means my shrine. I think I will.

(Isidore goes to the shrine doing a dance step.)

Peekaboo.

(Leopold stands in front of Isidore.)

LEOPOLD

Listen to me.

ISIDORE

Yes.

LEOPOLD

You're going to start behaving from now on.

(Isidore nods in consent.)

OK. That's all.

(Leopold goes back to the cards. Isidore passes wind through his lips.)

ISIDORE

So I'm going to start behaving from now on. Then what? ... Stop being silly. What is the matter with you, young man? You should be ashamed of yourself. What is life without humor here and there? A little bit of humor ... Look at him sorting out his little cards. He's a good boy.

LEOPOLD

I'm not sorting them. I just don't want to listen to you.

ISIDORE

You can't tear yourself away from them. Can you? ... You think I haven't seen you running to your cards the moment you think I'm not looking?

LEOPOLD

That's a lie. I've never...

ISIDORE

I never lie. I have never lied in my life.

(Card. Isidore crosses himself, then covers his head as if to protect himself from lightning.)

So what if I'm a liar. Do you think truth matters? Well, it doesn't.

(Card.)

Does that confound your infantile mind? It is order that matters, whether there's order or disorder.

(Card.)

A sloppy liar is despicable

(card)

, as despicable as a sloppy truth-teller.

(Card.)

Now, what do you deduce from that?

LEOPOLD

That you're rotten.

(Leopold flips a card to Isidore Isidore sniffs himself.)

ISIDORE

A systematic liar, a man with a goal, a man with a style is the best sort.

(Card.)

The most reliable. You'll never amount to anything until you learn that. No, you'll never amount to anything. You'll never make it in the army, the navy, politics, business, stardom. You're worthless. I'm almost tempted to give you the key.

LEOPOLD

Give it to me.

ISIDORE

Never mind that. Come here. I'm about to forgive you. Come now. You really don't want me to forgive you?

LEOPOLD

Where is it, Isidore?

ISIDORE

Oh, here, in my heart.

LEOPOLD

Where is it?

ISIDORE

Oh, you're so insistent. I'll tell you what.

(Isidore takes the horns and the cape.)

I'll answer all the questions you want if you do a little thing for me. Be a good bull and charge. Then I'll answer your question.

LEOPOLD

You'll tell me where the key is?

ISIDORE

Yes. Charge six times and I'll give you the key ... But you won't be satisfied with the key. On the contrary, it's when you have the key that you'll start asking questions. You'll start wondering about the mysteries of the universe.

(Counting the banderillas.)

One, two, three, four, five, six mysteries has the universe. As I stick each banderilla in your back I'll reveal the answer to a mystery. And then

(taking the sword)

the moment of truth. Right through the back of your neck. Oh, beautiful transgressions. While I'm answering your last question you'll be expiring your last breath. As eternal verity is revealed to you, darkness will come upon your eyes ... Fair? Fair. Charge.

LEOPOLD

Are you kidding?

ISIDORE

I am not kidding. I am proposing the most poetic diversion ever enjoyed by man. You mean to say you're not willing to die for the truth?

(Isidore rubs his fingers to indicate "shame.")

LEOPOLD

And when I'm crawling and bleeding to death begging you to answer my questions you'll say something like ... Ha ha.

ISIDORE

You want to play or you don't want to play?

LEOPOLD

I'll play. But I'll only charge six times. Six passes. I only want one answer. No mysteries.

ISIDORE

All right. Ask your question.

LEOPOLD

Where is the key?

ISIDORE

Charge.

LEOPOLD

Answer first.

ISIDORE

The answer after you charge.

(*Leopold begins to charge.*)

Wait. I lost the mood. I need preparation.

(*Isidore kneels in front of the shrine and crosses himself. He makes a trumpet with his hand and toots a bullfighter's march. Isidore performs the passes as he calls out the passes' names.*)

Toro and bull. Fearless, confident and dominant, without altering the composure of his figure. Isidore lifts the spectators from their seats as he receives his enemy with *Veronica*.

LEOPOLD

One.

ISIDORE

(*Turns his back toward the audience.*)

Turning his back to the planks below the box occupied by the Isidore Fan Club to whom he has dedicated this bull. He performs a dangerous *Revolera*. Marvelous both in its planning and development.

LEOPOLD

Two.

ISIDORE

Faroles. And the embellishment.

LEOPOLD

Four.

ISIDORE

Three. A punishing pass. *Pase de castigo*. All of Isidore's passes have identical depth and majestic sobriety.

LEOPOLD

Four.

ISIDORE

Manoletina. Astounding elegance and smoothness. The music breaks out and competes with the deafening clamor of the multitude.

LEOPOLD

Five.

(*Isidore bows, Leopold charges.*)

ISIDORE

Then, with authentic domination, he performs the *Isidorina*.

(*Isidore circles the stage and bows.*)

Ovation. One ear, turn. And cheers.

LEOPOLD

Six. Answer.

ISIDORE

Gore me.

LEOPOLD

Answer.

ISIDORE

Gore me. That's the answer.

(Leopold charges against Isidore, this time determined to get him. Isidore avoids him with a banderillo's turn while he thrusts a banderilla into Leopold's back.)

Saint Sebastian!

(Leopold falls to the floor. Isidore kneels beside him and holds him in his arms.)

Good bull. He attacked nobly and bravely. His killer made him take fifty-one passes and he would have continued charging, following docilely the course marked by deceit. He was cheered as he was hauled out, but less than he deserved.

(Isidore pulls out the banderilla from Leopold's back and caresses him tenderly. Leopold looks at Isidore imploringly. Isidore kisses Leopold.)

I have no alternative.

LEOPOLD

Don't tell me that, Isidore. I can't believe that.

ISIDORE

I have no alternative, Leopold.

LEOPOLD

No alternative? The alternative is simple.

ISIDORE

It isn't simple. I can't be good to you.

LEOPOLD

Just try.

ISIDORE

It's not within my power.

LEOPOLD

Have you no will then?

ISIDORE

No, I don't will it.

LEOPOLD

Who wills it?

ISIDORE

You, Leopold.

LEOPOLD

Me? It is not me, Isidore. You can't be right.

ISIDORE

It is you, Leopold.

LEOPOLD

I have never provoked you. I have never wished for anything but kindness from you. I have never tried but for your love.

ISIDORE

Yes, and maybe it is just that. Maybe you have been too patient, too good-natured.

(Leopold is astounded. There is a moment's pause. He then struggles with Isidore to break from his embrace.)

LEOPOLD

You are rotten ... What are you? What are you that you must have rottenness around you? I am too patient? Too good-natured? I will not become rotten for you. I will not become rotten for you.

(Leopold holds Isidore by the neck and tries to strangle him.)

ISIDORE

(Gasping for air.)

Son ... son ... let me tell you ... let me tell you ... a story ... There was once a man ... who ...

(Leopold covers his ears.)

It's very important. You must listen. There was once a man whose only companion was a white rat. He loved this white rat dearly. And one day the rat disappeared. The rat couldn't have left the room, because there were no doors, or windows, or even cracks on the walls or floor. Then the man, thinking that the rat could have hidden in some nook or cranny unknown to him, took his axe and wrecked everything he owned ... The rat was nowhere in his room. He then turned to a picture of the rat which was hanging on the wall, and was about to wield his axe against it ... but he stopped himself ... He said, "This is the only thing I have left of my rat. If I destroy the picture, I will have nothing left to remind me of him." And from that moment on, he began to speak to the picture of the rat and to caress it, and even feed it. Eventually, though, his loneliness brought him to such a state of melancholia that he no longer cared whether he was happy or not. He did not even care whether he lived or died. And as if he were summoning his own death, he picked up his axe and smashed the picture of the rat. There, trapped in the wires that supported the picture, was his beloved rat, who had died of starvation. The dead rat turned his head to face the man and said

(as if imitating a ghost)

, "If you had not been satisfied with my picture you could have had me. You chicken-hearted bastard," and then disintegrated into dust.

LEOPOLD

(Frightened.)

A fairy tale.

ISIDORE

There is a moral to it, Leopold. Try to understand it.

LEOPOLD

The dead don't speak.

ISIDORE

Yes, they do. You'll see, you'll see. Understand the story, Leopold. You must relinquish what you want or you will never have it.

LEOPOLD

I understand one thing. There is something that moves you. There is something that makes you tender and loving, only one thing nastiness ... and meanness and abuse.

ISIDORE

Those are three things, Leopold.

LEOPOLD

They're all the same.

ISIDORE

It's our fate.

LEOPOLD

Not mine ... I love ...

ISIDORE

You don't love. Don't you see that. All you do is whine!

LEOPOLD

It's time you answered my question, Isidore.

ISIDORE

I answered it.

LEOPOLD

You told me to gore you.

ISIDORE

Yes, I did.

LEOPOLD

Is that the answer?

ISIDORE

That was my answer.

LEOPOLD

You stabbed me. I want my answer.

ISIDORE

There is a way, Leopold, but only one. You must find it yourself.

LEOPOLD

That's no answer. You wounded me.

ISIDORE

You tried to gore me. I had to defend myself.

LEOPOLD

You told me to gore you.

ISIDORE

That was part of the game.

LEOPOLD

Stinking bastard. Can you bear your own rottenness? You must atone for your wickedness sometime. You cannot go on without a purge. Do you ever pray? Do you bear your fist against your chest and ask for forgiveness? If not to redeem yourself, at least to be able to go on with your viciousness. You could not endure it without a purge. Do you spend your nights covering your ears to keep away the sound of my moans? Do you cry then? ... Could it be that you do it out of stupidity, that you don't know the difference between right and wrong? Oh no. Let it be anything but that. Let it be malice. If you do it out of a decision to be harmful, I can convince you that it's best to be good. But if you don't know the difference between right and wrong, is there anything I can do? Maybe you must be vicious in spite of yourself. Maybe you have to do it ... to protect me from something worse? ... for my own good?

(Leopold throws himself on his knees with his head on Isidore's lap.)

Give me a sign, a smile, a look. Tell me you love me.

(Isidore pouts innocently. He makes a circle with his arm and places his hand on Leopold's head. The lights fade.)

Scene 3

SCENE 3

(Isidore and Leopold are in the same position. Isidore stretches himself and yawns. He jerks his thighs slightly to make Leopold's head roll and fall to the floor. Isidore looks at Leopold who is making up and smiles. Isidore stands up, stretches again, and does a dance step.)

ISIDORE

Cheery-uppy, Leopold.

(The follwing scene is to have a nightmarish quality. Isidore and Leopold dance in a ritualistic manner. Isidore puts on one of the two beetle masks, the one which is wingless, and gives the other to Leopold. Leopold should behave like a sleep-walker.)

Beetles are versatile little animals. For great numbers, the end of autumn does not mean the end of their lives. There are more beetles by far than any other kind of insect. Over a quarter of a million beetle species have been described. Beetles are in constant conflict with man because there are few of the organic commodities that man has learned to use that do not also interest some beetle. Some spend their life in the thick flesh of century-plant leaves and when caught make an excellent

salad, tasting something like a shrimp salad. Other notable varieties are: The Clavicornia, the segments of whose torso are variable in number and whose antennae are equipped with a more or less

(Isidore does a bump and grind)

distinct club, the terminal segments being broader than the others. The Hydrophilidae

(Isidore places his arms in arabesque position)

Silphidae, Staphylinidae, Nitidulidae

(convulsing)

, Histeridae, Coccinellidae, Ebonychisae

(holding his breasts)

, Erotylidae, Languiridae, and Dermestidae. The literature of beetles is enormous.

LEOPOLD

(Crawling on the floor.)

When things are in disorder and I move, I feel like I'm crawling. As if with every movement I have to drag along with me the things that are in disorder. As if I had grown brooms on my sides that extend as far as the wall, to sweep the junk ... the dust.

(Leopold picks up some of the cards, looks at Isidore and smiles sadly.)

ISIDORE

They are for your own good. Ingrate. Don't you know? Come, do me a pretty beetle.

LEOPOLD

Dirt, my dear sir, comes to us from everywhere. And it comes out from within us. It comes out through each pore. Then we wash it away, we flush it away, we drown it, we bury it, we incinerate it, and then we perfume ourselves. We put odors in our toilets, medicinal odors, terrible odors, but all these odors seem sweet next to our own. What I want, sir, is to live with that loathsome mess near me, not to flush it away. To live with it for all those who throw perfume on it. To be so dirty for those who want to be so clean. To do them that favor. I wanted to drop it in the pot and leave it there for days, and live with it.

ISIDORE

Sometimes you touch the realm of romance.

LEOPOLD

In the latter part of the afternoon I feel cold, I feel the stuff in my bowels. And I feel downcast. The open air is in my mind, but my eyes wander around this cave. I feel such pain for being here.

ISIDORE

The contrast between your poet's taste for languid amusement and my unconventional pageantry sends such fresh impetus throbbing through my veins.

LEOPOLD

I see a light in you. The only light. I see it through a tunnel lower than myself. Attempting to go through it and hoping to be invited, I crawl.

ISIDORE

Crawl then. Crawl then.

(Leopold crawls.)

LEOPOLD

I liked to think I was an exception, of course, I pretended I was not one more snake. And to prove I was an exception, I tried to stand erect, and to stand erect I needed you to support me, and when you refused I had to beg, and to beg I had to crawl, and snakes crawl, and I am a snake. When crawling tires me, I stand erect. It is to exhaustion and disillusion that I owe my dignity. Not to pride ... Oh ... I cannot make your eyes turn to me with love.

ISIDORE

Give me a pretty smile, pretty beetle.

(Leopold opens his mouth wide.)

LEOPOLD

To make dirt come out through the mouth you have to close your holes very tight, and let the dirt rot inside. Then it will come out through any opening.

ISIDORE

The prophet, the prophet. Come and hear the dirty prophet.

LEOPOLD

(Taking off his mask.)

Oh, Isidore, you are my enemy.

ISIDORE

I am not your enemy.

LEOPOLD

Come here. Let me see you.

(Isidore moves near Leopold.)

Take that mask off.

(Isidore takes the mask off.)

You *are* my enemy.

ISIDORE

What makes you say that?

LEOPOLD

Your smell ...

ISIDORE

How do I smell?

LEOPOLD

You stink.

ISIDORE

Not true. What you smell is your own stink. You are putrid.

LEOPOLD

I'm going to kill you.

ISIDORE

Don't, you're trying to scare me. You're trying to scare me so I'll be good to you.

LEOPOLD

No ... I know nothing can make you change. No ... If I were to frighten you you'd behave for a while, but then you would get to like it, and you'd want more and more of it.

ISIDORE

And you wouldn't do it just to please your old friend?

LEOPOLD

No, I wouldn't. I have already played too many of your games. I have become as corrupt as you intended me to be. But ... no more.

ISIDORE

You can't stop now. It's too late.

LEOPOLD

I know. That's why I've decided to kill you.

ISIDORE

You have?

(Leopold goes to the shrine and gets the knife. Isidore hides behind a piece of furniture and begins a mock trembling.)

LEOPOLD

Get up, Isidore.

ISIDORE

No.

(Leopold lifts the knife and holds it up for a moment, then lowers it slowly.)

LEOPOLD

If I killed you what would I be?

ISIDORE

A murderer ... that's what you'd be ... a murderer. A dirty ratty murderer.

LEOPOLD

There will be no one to judge me.

ISIDORE

Yourself ... you'll judge yourself. You'll die of guilt.

LEOPOLD

Guilt? Is that what it is?

ISIDORE

Yes. And then you'll be all alone. You don't know what it is to be alone. It's horribly ... lonely.

LEOPOLD

I'm afraid of my own death. I see myself dead.

ISIDORE

You're not going to do it then?

LEOPOLD

You're disappointed.

ISIDORE

Yes, I thought I was going to have some thrills and suspense never knowing when you would strike ... having to sleep with one eye open. But as usual you are a party-pooper ... You could never kill me, Leopold Don't you see? You are just what I want you to be. You only know what I have taught you. And I haven't taught you how to kill.

LEOPOLD

You have offended me. If you died I still would be offended.

ISIDORE

I have offended you and you haven't challenged me to a duel? Challenge me to a duel immediately ... What kind of a mouse are you ... I have offended you. I am offending you right now. You mouse.

(Smack)

You mouse.

(Smack.)

You misbegotten mouse. You misbegotten, liteless mouse.

LEOPOLD

If I killed you the offense would not be undone. If you died, you would not be able to atone for it.

ISIDORE

Don't worry, there isn't a chance of that. I'll kill you and be done with you.

(Isidore puts the sword in Leopold's hand.)

LEOPOLD

If you killed me you would be convinced that you had the right to offend me.

ISIDORE

Beautiful, beautiful. Let's duel. You'll fight for your offended pride. I, for the right to offend you. Come on. Come on.

LEOPOLD

Please stop, Isidore.

ISIDORE

No, this is fun. It's fun. *En garde.*

LEOPOLD

(Poking different objects with his sword.)

What are these things ... Leopold? Leopold? Are you Leopold? Are you ... they don't strike back. You are Leopold.

ISIDORE

Too much reflection.

(Isidore pokes Leopold with the sword. Leopold shrinks back.)

LEOPOLD

Each time I hold back I die a little.

ISIDORE

That's why you stink, you're putrid with death. Cleanliness is close to godliness.

(Card.)

I still have a lot to teach you.

LEOPOLD

(Swaying.)

I feel faint. If only I could find a spot to fix on and steady myself.

ISIDORE

(Swaying and lurching.)

Look at me. Let me be the spot. Look, everything is moving. But I am steady as a rock.

LEOPOLD

Come here, Isidore. Open your arms.

(Isidore obeys. Leopold lifts the sword slowly, points it to Isidore's heart, and pushes it into his body. Isidore falls to the floor.)

ISIDORE

How could you do this?

(Leopold holds Isidore in his arms. He doesn't answer.)

Say you're sorry and my wound will heal.

LEOPOLD

I know.

ISIDORE

Say you're sorry.